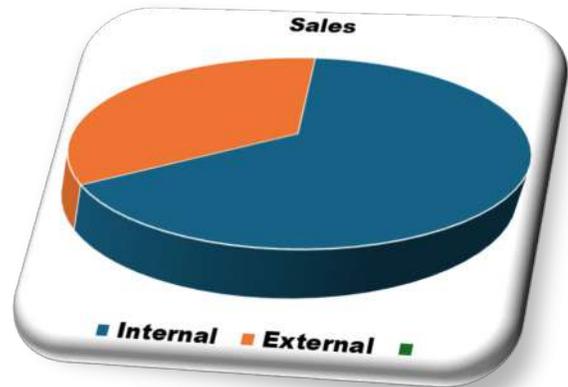


Your Most Important Customer

Interacting with your customers is absolutely critical. Have you ever considered the fact that most of your sales are not to retail customers. I conducted an informal and small survey that suggested 65% of parts sales go through the service department (my experience suggest it is higher than that). Therefore, the technicians are your largest customer group. (1)

Bad relations with technicians will make both of your lives miserable and will have a dramatically negative impact on the ability to do their job effectively. How should you interaction with and service this group vary from retail customers?



How they are different

When talking to a retail customer you really want them to purchase something (both now and for years to come). An internal customer is locked in to buying from you, and you are locked in with them. Making this relationship even more important.

- **Expectations:** Technicians are more knowledgeable about their needs than are retail customers. Their priority is not usually price. Instead, it is on quality & brand reputation. Afterall, if the product fails, they typically must redo that work for free. (2)
- **How you communicate:** Internal customer communication is usually more informal and more direct. Typically, you do not have to sell them on a product, Communication is much more about efficiency than it is selling. When I was a Parts Manager at an RV dealership, I had a difficult time communicating with technicians. Once I started treating them with respect they started reciprocating. My life got much better very quickly.
- **The impact:** The goal of good internal relationships is the same as with external relationships. You are trying to service the end customer. Taking care of a technician is helping your retail customers on whose vehicle they are working. If the technician feels valued, they will have productive interactions with those customers, leading to sales growth. (3)

How they are the same

Technicians may or may not be relying on your product knowledge, but you are both still benefited by having a great relationship. Therefore, it pays to think of them as you would a retail customer in several aspects.

- **Relationship:** Like retail customers, technicians “don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Since most are paid on a flat rate basis, the faster they can finish a job, the more they get paid per real hour and per week. If you care, you will help them get the right part(s) as quickly as possible.
- **Trust:** From technicians, trust means a more pleasant interaction (they will not be second guessing every interaction, getting increasingly upset at delays). Trust in the product you have and/or recommend makes their life much easier.
- **Profit:** I have heard Parts Managers complain that they make less when selling to technicians. That is not always the case, but it typically is when it comes to parts going on warranty orders or PDF orders. But if you calculate total profit on internal vs external sales, you are way ahead internally. Calculating the reduced time needed for each individual technician sales, that profit goes way up.

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How it is done

It may seem simple, but too many people take liberties with internal customers like technicians. They let their guard down and never consider specific ways they can improve the relationship with this critical customer base.

- **Be respectful:** We often forget such pleasantries such as saying, “good morning,” “please” and “thank you.” These show you care, and you respect them personally. (4) You do not want to get too personal, but if you do get to know their personalities, their pressures, and their frustrations, you can better address their needs. (5) This is not always easy as it requires patience and humility on your part.
- **Ask them for help:** Many do not like asking for help or advice. But asking a technician for help and/or advice will improve the connection & relationship. (6) This requires some vulnerability on your part, but it is a fast track to a better relationship. You may not always be able to act on the advice, but when you do the impact is easily doubled.
- **Show appreciation:** When appropriate, a well-placed compliment (given immediately) can go a long way. Flattery will backfire, so it must be real, sincere, and not overstated. If you can find a way to do something special for them, that has the chance to drastically improve the relationship. (7)
- **Anticipate their needs:** Obviously, a lot of this happens through great inventory management. To go beyond that you should ask your internal customers what they perceive as opportunities for you to better anticipate their need.
- **Be clear:** Technicians likely think they understand how things work internally, but typically there are necessary policies and procedures of which they are not aware. Be sure they understand your role, your pressures, and your frustrations. They may be able to make your life easier.
- **Joint problem solving:** From some of the above you may see a pattern. You can help with their issues, and they can help with your issues. Together you can go beyond that and brainstorm ways to improve the dealership. A great start with this is for each to make a list of issues they see in the dealer (whether it affects your department or not). Think about it for a few days, then take a lunch break or such to discuss. You could be surprised at the results.

Conclusion

I heard a technician say, “I want a Parts Manager that has their own unique way of seeing things my way, whether they like it or not.” You may never be able to pull that off, but having a great relationship with internal customers will not only help you make more money but help them make more money as well. That relationship will make both lives more pleasant. Start this by greeting the technicians personally each day, but go beyond that by anticipating their need, showing appreciation, and providing clear communication. Probably the most important aspect of this is having the right product in stock when



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they need it. That issue is part of what makes just-in-time inventory management so risky (click [here](#) to read our article about managing inventory in a Just-In-Time world).

Ultra-Fab

Ultra-Fab wants to help make your relationship with technicians more pleasant. Using Ultra-Fab products will ensure the technicians' need for quality is met. Their confidence in your abilities will improve due to the product's reliability.

For more information on how Ultra-Fab can help grow your sales and especially your profits, feel free to check out our dealer website (ultra-fab.com/dealers) or contact Raymond Padgett (404.754.8928 or raymond@ultra-fab.com).

Our product quality is another way that Ultra-Fab shows we are determined to help you make more money.